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‘Louis Marin: On the Powers of Representation.’

Submission for a special issue of *Early Modern French Studies*.

Introduction – Alain Cantillon and Nigel Saint

From 1978 onwards, Louis Marin (1931-1992) was a Director of Studies at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris, where his seminar was entitled ‘Sémantique des systèmes représentatifs’, and, later on, ‘Systèmes de représentation à l’âge moderne’. From the very beginning, Marin worked on the structures and historical developments of representation, for instance in his investigations into the theory of the sign in the Port-Royal *Logic*, Pascal’s philosophy of language, the analogies between language and painting (Poussin, Champaigne and Klee), and the narrative strategies of the New Testament gospels and Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Over time he focused more on the theoretical complexities and practical modalities of the systems of representation found in literature, philosophy, history and the visual arts, especially in the early modern period. Marin’s work in the period also extended to Perrault, La Fontaine, Retz, Corneille, Pierre Nicole’s essays, royal medals, Félibien’s court history and the gardens of Versailles. At the same time, Marin’s approach to his chosen texts and images remained a modern one, underlining the ‘mutually beneficial interactions’ of modern theory and early modern texts. For Marin theory and history *had* to be ‘on speaking terms’.¹ His peripatetic existence as a cultural attaché, scholar and teacher in Turkey, London and the US (notably La Jolla, San Diego, in the mid-1970s) opened up the perspectives he brought to bear on his objects.²

We have chosen to devote this special issue to the powers of representation, looking at the nature of the relationship between representation and presence, representation and imitation, and representation and similarity, dissimilarities or even pure and infinite difference.³ This expression ‘powers of representation’, which echoes certain of Marin’s books more directly than others, opens a point of access to his work in its entirety. This expression belongs in the first place to an ensemble principally constituted by two works, *Le Portrait du roi* (1981) and *Des Pouvoirs de l’image* (1993). In 1981, the

expression appears in a well-known chiasmus, which consequently has become somewhat overused and often misunderstood: the powers of representation and the representations of power.⁴ What this chiasmus signals is the inseparable interlacing of powers and representations or even, since Marin always studied empirical singular beings and material *a priori* together, simply of power and representation.⁵ Power does not, and cannot, exist without or detached from representation or from the representations of this power or of these powers.

This theory rests upon a very rigorous definition of what is called power, a term which distinguishes it as much from potency as from strength. Strength, power and potency make up a triad that is in effect the social and political foundation of his semiology: on the basis of the introductions to *Le Portrait du roi* and *Des Pouvoirs de l'image*, we can say that in Marin's view to have power is to have a reserve of strength which has the potential to be used, and that power is an institution of potency, of the possibilities, of the capacities of a strength which is not used and which does not exert itself, but which threatens to be used in the exercise of legitimate, authorised strength.⁶

Marin's studies show, thoroughly and precisely, how representations accumulate reserves of strength. These studies are all part of a theoretical reflection on the nature of the sign (in the West) as representative sign. It is in this way that the introduction to *Le Portrait du roi* presents this work as the continuation of the previous one (*La Critique du discours*), as the extension of the theoretical reflection on the sign which began in this text. What Marin found and revealed in the links between the Port-Royal *Logique* and the *Pensées-de-Pascal* is a critical elaboration of a theory of the sign (as representative sign) at a certain moment in time and in a certain region of the world.⁷ Therefore, Marin focuses carefully on understanding how, in each discourse and image (including paintings, tapestries and medals), signs are organised in relation to one other, how they produce meaning and how they function.

The theological controversies between Calvinists and Catholics concerning what is commonly referred to – in the Catholic Church – as 'real presence' rest upon a theory of the representative sign and of the relationship between presence and representation, particularly as far as the phrase 'this is my body' is concerned. More broadly, the narratives of Christianity were studied very thoroughly by Marin as,

according to the expression of Claude Lévi-Strauss often cited by Marin, 'des modèles faits à la maison'; it is in this way, for example, that the Tuscan Annunciations of the Quattrocento appear in the book *L'Opacité de la peinture* (1989), as diverse practical and theoretical propositions on 'la venue de l'infigurable dans la figure et de l'incirconscriptible dans le lieu'.⁸ The formal system of pictorial enunciation which is then invented (the representation of space and depth in perspective) allows 'la figurabilité du secret de l'Annonciation par le chiffre du dispositif perspectif'.⁹

It must be emphasised that such a study of home-made models is only possible (and the reference to Claude Lévi-Strauss, will, in itself, be enough to convey this) thanks to an extremely rigorous deployment of the knowledge base and savoir-faire of structuralism, initially in the form of a structuralist semiology with a philosophical outlook: a philosopher who would take an interest in human affairs (necessarily in certain human affairs only, due to time constraints) such as they are recorded by history in the shape of signs as artefacts. This method presents itself in the very first writings of Marin as an attempt to elaborate what Emile Benveniste called 'a second-generation semiology', an expression often cited by Marin.¹⁰ In this type of semiology, it is enunciation, or more exactly, as Marin puts it, the enunciations, which ought to be studied. This is why it is of little importance whether signs can or cannot be considered abstractly as a language separate from these enunciations. And it is thus that an image, or an ensemble, even a series, of images can be very relevantly studied as semiotic ensembles without needing first to build a repertoire of forms or even a grammar of graphic and pictorial representation.

What the writings of Marin do, and it is for this reason that they are important, is to analyze very closely each time the composition, the play of the colours, the relationship between the figures, the way in which certain figures establish a link between a representation and the world of the spectator, the methods of framing, the relationship between text and image, the thickness of the surface of representation, or the relationship (in frescos, for example, as we will see) between the architecture represented and the architectonics of the place of representation. The discourses and images very often produce the formal apparatus of their enunciation, to which Marin showed himself particularly attentive, and the whole of his work can be regarded as a methodology for learning how to see, to discover, to make

visible, and to understand the enunciation of utterances. It would have indeed been somewhat unconvincing and to no avail to have evoked the strength, the potency, the powers of representative signs without finding a way to render them visible. This second-generation semiology does so because by studying enunciation it does not remain at the level of the utterance, of what the discourses and images say and show, but instead, reaching the level of enunciation, it touches upon what these discourses and these images can do (their potency, their powers).

As mentioned at the beginning, Marin's methodology takes the form of a multiplication of singular, individual studies, which cover a vast expanse of semiotic objects: autobiographical stories, paintings, medals and many writings by canonical authors of French literature from the 16th to the 20th centuries, all studied from different angles. Thus, for example, the book *La Parole mangée* (*Food for Thought* in English) is concerned with 'l'étrange relation qui se noue entre une fonction du corps, dite « oralité » et ses organes et la fonction du langage sous ses deux dimensions, verbale (orale?) et écrite,' studied in relation to the reflections on the Eucharist in the Port-Royal *Logic*, but also *Gargantua*, certain tales by Perrault, and the medical diary of Louis XIV.¹¹

Before turning more explicitly to the contributions that make up this special issue, let us consider an example of the powers of representation, and of an attempt to grasp them directly, in the description and analysis of a fresco and of the relationships between the painting and the spectator's gaze, which expounds the painting from the point of view which it (the painting) has assigned to it (the gaze): the study of the fresco said to be by Filippo Lippi in the cathedral of Prato.¹² It is a very big fresco and Marin wonders about the effects that it may produce on its 'spectator-reader'. He focuses principally on the striking relationship between the real architecture and the represented architecture, on the syncope of the separation of the body and the head of John the Baptist ('étrange découpe du « sujet », celui de l'histoire peinte'), as well as on another figure of rupture and of syncope, that of the time of the narrative.

Figure 1 ('Fig. 11' from Marin's *Opacité de la peinture*, reproduced here) shows the represented space, and the real space and the location of the severance. In figure 2 ('Fig. 12') the narrative syncope appears (scene no. 1 should be in position A, scene no. 2 in position B); figure 2 also shows the enigma of

the narrative surplus at 4/D.¹³ The study carried out by Marin emphasises the fact that Salome, as she offers the severed head to Herodias does not look at her but looks instead in the direction of the point of view which is assigned to the spectator-reader of the fresco, a look which is doubled by the sidelong glance of the servant, who is on the far right, and who may also be another occurrence of Salome. Thus the spectator-reader, 'en état de choc' (p. 210), caused by the multiple syncopations, to whom the severed head is presented by Salome's gaze, and who is moreover solicited by the servant's sidelong glance, is also summoned 'figurativement dans la scène,' the locus of a 'objet virtuel (ou de désir)' (p. 219). Marin's minute and powerful analysis allows us to gain a good understanding of what he is saying when he states, on several occasions, that the representations (and perhaps therein lies their principal power) produce effects of subject(ion): the constitution of a subject who is both looking and reading, which is at the same time the subjection of the spectator-reader to what she or he reads and sees. This situation even applies to Louis XIV, when he sees himself in the portrait painted by Le Brun and reads about himself in the description of this portrait provided by Félibien (as discussed in *Le Portrait du roi*).¹⁴

*

We have so far underlined that Marin analysed the ways in which readers and spectators are implicated in representations. In the readings of his work that follow we see examples of the sharing of this experience as our contributors are led by Marin's methodology to investigate his interpretations and to consider their own relation to them. A key phrase that recurs in his work concerns the self-reflexive nature of representation: 'Toute représentation se présente représentant quelque chose'.¹⁵ Marin's work appeals to readers, as we have been arguing, because of the consistent approach he takes to opening up the system of representation at work in any object to examine how the act of representation works: who is being represented, how the representation presents itself, or in other words how an awareness of the transparency and opacity of representation increases our understanding of the material and physical dimensions of a work of art, as well as of the historical ideas and objects being represented. The four main

areas of Marin's work chosen by our contributors are utopia, representation, literature and painting, with Marin's finesse as a thinker seen as a common feature across the special issue.

The twin qualities of transparency and opacity, or of the transitive and reflexive, reflect the potential power of representation. Alan Montefiore relates how in Marin's writing on utopia, he was very sensitive to the instability of key political terms and very self-aware when constructing arguments; such is the impression certainly of the playfully reflective contribution from Marin to Montefiore's edited volume *Philosophy in France Today*.¹⁶ Montefiore recommends that we pay more attention to the style of Marin's writing as part of his methodology, which is indeed a dimension that all our contributors touch on more or less explicitly.

In the case of Pierre-Antoine Fabre, who also discusses Marin and utopia, it is the role of quotation in Marin's texts that leads to further analysis of style and rhetoric. Quotation, if the material cited is not fetishized, has a utopian function, meaning in particular that it forces an engagement with the present, with perspective and with enunciation. Fabre also argues that politics and the present interrupt the spatial mysteries of the utopian discourse. Fabre is led to consider the result of the utopian enquiry and asks whether it is like a postlapsarian condition; with Fabre as our guide we reach a tantalizing moment where Marin faces a choice between a political and a theological approach.

There is little scope for individual agency in the system of representation evoked in Christian Jouhaud's attentive examination of spaces (the town of Richelieu and baroque churches) and decorative schemes (the Escalier des Ambassadeurs at Versailles, since destroyed). These domination machines seek to subject the inhabitants, worshippers and visitors to the authority of God or the King and his Court. Jouhaud discusses Marin's link with the work of Pierre Charpentrat on the baroque and on trompe-l'œil and argues that these sites of propaganda and control feature the complete instrumentalization of the spaces involved. Marin's philosophical approach to space and representation should, according to Jouhaud, be an essential part of any historical enquiry.

Alain Cantillon's discussion of Marin as a reader of Pascal offers a crucial insight into his critique of representation. Discussing key passages from *La Critique du discours*, he demonstrates how Marin's

analysis of representation escapes being imprisoned within the system that it unpacks and shows why the analysis avoids being a failed metalanguage. In the course of his argument, Cantillon introduces an instructive comparison between Marin and Foucault on the subject of the break between the classical and the modern epistemes.¹⁷ We see that Marin does not subscribe to ideological subservience: Pascal's fragments act as counter-models in Marin's reading of the main model of representation in the Port-Royal *Logic*. Pascalian fragments break down the parameters of judgement, self and reason, but also gesture, in Cantillon's view, to future readers; he suggests that our roles as readers of Pascal may need to be reassigned. Attributing such force to the fragments of Pascal anticipates the readings of power that were to be developed in *Le Portrait du roi*.

The self-sufficiency of a system of classification or enquiry, before its fault-lines are exposed, also concerns Giacomo Fuk in his exploration of Marin's early semiological work on the language of painting. Fuk shows how Marin leaves aside the attempt to treat painting as a linguistic system with the pictorial equivalent of morphemes and phonemes (a point evoked above in relation to enunciation and 'second-generation semiology'), but retains the notion of analogy between language and painting. This enables Marin to continue to explore the relations between word and image while also accounting for the experience of a painting. Stendhal, admirer of Italian Renaissance artists and Montesquieu, makes one of his several appearances in this issue because Fuk sees his diagrams in *Vie de Henry Brulard* as emblems of the dual thinking across the disciplines of philosophy and semiotics.

Nigel Saint also offers a critique of the view that Marin imposed structuralist methods on art, in this case the paintings of Poussin. Marin's careful reading of descriptions of Poussin's *Landscape with a Man Killed by a Snake* has a very different purpose and opens up the painting to different encounters. In this context, Saint examines T. J. Clark's misreading of Marin in *The Sight of Death* (2006). Echoing Montefiore's point about Marin's writing, there are grounds for seeing Marin's methodology as a stylistic enterprise, partly facilitated by writing for the journal *Corps écrit*. His later work on Poussin, launched in his mid-1980s Paris seminar, also looked at the potential of pictorial variation, notably in relation to the *Four Seasons*, leading to a novel view of the cycle as a combination of human figures, Biblical stories and the elements.

Marin's later work features the introduction of terms like 'figurabilité,' 'énonciabilité' and 'descriptibilité', exploring visual figures, states of identity and conceptualisations that move between the formed and the formless.¹⁸ In terms of painting, autobiography and other narratives, Marin pursues his studies of the representation of the self in relation to the difficulties of aligning language and experience. Agnès Guiderdoni discusses Marin's general methodology and shows how he arrives at 'figurabilité' as a result of wanting to think beyond the word-image opposition. The two media push each other to create 'visual' figures in texts and texts in visual images: Guiderdoni refers here to Marin's work on the figurability of the self in Montaigne's 'De l'amitié' and 'Au lecteur', in the first case, and to Champaigne's *Ex-Voto* in the second. In the essay collection referred to by Guiderdoni, *L'Écriture de soi*, Marin argues that Montaigne's inhabitation of the space of the frame around the intended portrait becomes the place where the self-portrait could emerge, with Marin using the term figurability to indicate the desire and potential for figures of the self at the edge or frontier of self-knowledge and of knowledge of the other.¹⁹

Finally, text and image relations are at the core of Dinah Ribard's discussion of Philippe de Champaigne's painting *Moses Presenting the Tablets of the Law*. Contrasting Champaigne's meditative approach with the less restrained Jesuit-directed version of the same subject by Claude Vignon, Ribard notes that contemporary moral and pragmatic concerns about the use of images are highlighted in Champaigne's painting by the use of the French language. Champaigne always seeks to indicate a mysterious presence, which urges us to seek the clues within the image and the text. Ribard successfully argues that Marin's objects are scrutinised for what they reveal about their system of representation and for their effect on that system and its historical period. Instead of a theoretical or intellectual enquiry, Marin suggests that his Champaigne volume sought to participate in a broader programme of reflection: 'mise à l'épreuve de la représentation plutôt, avec tout ce que cette expression peut impliquer de tension éthique, de travail de l'affect, d'ascèse de l'imagination et de la sensibilité'.²⁰ Ribard quotes this passage from near the beginning of the last book Marin saw to completion; a note prefacing the 'tableau chronologique' near the end of the book includes the hope that it might 'susciter quelques nouvelles recherches,' as indeed his study has done and as his work in general continues to do.²¹

This special issue hopes to provide an intriguing introduction to Marin's thought to those who may not be familiar with it, while at the same time appealing to those who have been engaging with Marin for many years. Any attempt at an overall presentation of the writings of Louis Marin benefits greatly from the interview (in written form) with Pascale Cassagnau included in *De L'Entretien* (1997), which aims to capture the 'sujet "duel" antérieur à tout dialogue,' which is plural 'dans sa duellité'.²² In order to do this, Marin presents a fictitious dialogue in which his views are dispersed in a complex game of multiple identity. Among the different speakers in the imaginary dialogue, we encounter 'Moi' (dated 1977 and 1992), 'l'amateur,' 'le sémiologue (quelque peu pragmaticien)' or 'le sémiologue (quelque peu philologue),' 'le professeur (historien),' 'le professeur (philosophe),' and, finally, 'le philosophe (quelque peu sociologue)'.²³ These interlocutors are not the '*personae* d'un dialogue qui aurait pu avoir lieu, mais de simples traces, pas toujours cohérentes, de souvenirs, de rencontres, de lectures, d'images.'²⁴ In *De L'Entretien* we navigate with Marin through 'tout un humus inchoatif de désirs et de pensées, d'affects et de sentiments' in search of 'le sol fertile d'un fondement critique' (17). With the lightness of touch (*eutrapelia*) Marin always insisted upon, this game expresses the profound coherence of his work (though genuine coherence makes light of coherence, of course).

¹ See the contributions of Richard Scholar and Michael Moriarty to *Theory and the Early Modern*, ed. by Michael Moriarty and John O'Brien, *Paragraph* 19 (2006), 40-52 and 1-11.

² See the biographical outline and complete bibliography of the writings of and about Louis Marin, compiled and maintained by Cléo Pace, available at Association Louis Marin's website:

<<http://www.louismarin.fr>> [accessed 19th January 2016]. For nearly all of the period 1970-77 Marin occupied posts at San Diego (La Jolla), Baltimore, Johns Hopkins, Columbia and Montreal. He also returned to the US during the 1980s, notably to Johns Hopkins again, Berkeley and Princeton. His association with Fredric Jameson, Michael Fried, Wolfgang Iser, Joan DeJean and Dahlia Judovitz in the 1970s and 1980s has

been recorded, while important friendships with other visiting French scholars also flourished in the US, among them Michel de Certeau, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy.

³ The remainder of the first part of this introduction is based on Alain Cantillon's opening remarks at the study day he organised at the Maison Française d'Oxford, 17th May 2013: '*Des pouvoirs de la représentation (histoire, littérature, peinture) : Louis Marin Aujourd'hui*'. We would like to thank Rebecca Loxton for her assistance with the translation.

⁴ L. Marin, *Le Portrait du roi* (Paris: Minuit, 1981), p. 9.

⁵ In *De L'Entretien*, in answer to a question about whether a representation's opacity was its transcendental condition, Marin emphasized Mikel Dufrenne's sense of the material *a priori* structures of an object in contrast to the formal ones (p. 66).

⁶ L. Marin, *Le Portrait du roi*, p. 12, and *Des Pouvoirs de l'image : Gloses* (Paris : Le Seuil, 1993), p. 16.

⁷ L. Marin, *La Critique du discours* (Paris: Minuit, 1975). On the use of the hyphens in the title *Pensées-de-Pascal*, see A. Cantillon, *Le Pari-de-Pascal, étude littéraire d'une série d'énonciations* (Paris: Vrin, coll. « Contextes », 2014).

⁸ L. Marin, *L'Opacité de la peinture*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions de L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006), p. 188.

⁹ *L'Opacité de la peinture*, p. 182.

¹⁰ Émile Benveniste, « Sémiologie de la langue », *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, 2 (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 66.

¹¹ L. Marin, *La Parole mangée et autres essais théologico-politiques* (Paris: Méridiens, 1986), p. 7.

¹² *L'Opacité de la peinture*, pp. 201-30. For a photograph of Filippo Lippi's *Feast of Herod* from the Prato Cathedral fresco cycle of the stories of St Stephen and St John the Baptist (1452-1465), see <http://www.wikiart.org/en/filippo-lippi/the-feast-of-herod-salome-s-dance-1464> (accessed March 22 2016).

¹³ The editors are very grateful to the publishers for their kind permission to reproduce these two diagrams from L. Marin, *L'Opacité de la peinture*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2006), p. 210 and p. 212.

¹⁴ *Le Portait du roi*, pp. 251-60.

¹⁵ L. Marin, *De La Représentation* (Paris: Gallimard/Le Seuil, 1994), p. 370.

¹⁶ L. Marin, 'Discourse of Power/Power of Discourse, Pascalian Notes' in *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. by Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 175-97.

¹⁷ Cf. David Packwood's discussion of Marin how 'bridg[ed] the gap between the "order of things," the age of classifying, and the era of modern painting' in his work on the sublime and *l'informe*: D. Packwood, 'Louis Marin,' *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, 2nd Edition, vol. 4, ed. by Michael Kelly (Oxford: OUP, 2014), pp. 250-53.

¹⁸ *De La Représentation*, p. 260.

¹⁹ L. Marin, '« C'est moi que je peins... » : De la figurabilité du moi chez Montaigne,' *L'Écriture de soi* (Paris: PUF, 1999), pp. 113-125.

²⁰ L. Marin, *Philippe de Champaigne ou la présence cachée* (Paris: Hazan, 1995), p. 14.

²¹ *Philippe de Champaigne*, 387. For the impact of Marin's book, see *Le Dieu caché: les peintres du Grand Siècle et la vision de Dieu* (Rome: Académie de France à Rome, 2000), ed. by Olivier Bonfait and Neil MacGregor; and *Philippe de Champaigne (1602–1674): Entre politique et dévotion*, ed. by Alain Tapié and Nicolas Sainte Fare Garnot (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2006).

²² L. Marin, *De L'Entretien* (Paris: Minuit, 1997), p. 16.

²³ *De L'Entretien*, pp. 17-39.

²⁴ *De L'Entretien*, p. 17.